

## **Bidding war is on for border agents**

Private company offers six figures for year in Iraq

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PHOENIX — At a time when lawmakers in Arizona and across the Southwest — not to mention Congress — are looking to make our southern border more secure, the U.S. State Department is recruiting 120 Border Patrol agents to send to Iraq.

Gov. Janet Napolitano Wednesday criticized the Bush administration for hiring a company to raid the Border Patrol.

In a letter to the president, Napolitano said it "makes no sense" for the State Department to try to recruit up to 120 active Border Patrol officers to help train Iraqis how to guard their own border. DynCorp recruiters will be in Tucson today to offer agents \$134,114 for a one-year contract, plus a \$25,000 signing bonus.

"We should be focused on supporting our nation's security efforts along the Mexican and Canadian border instead of hampering CBP (Customs and Border Protection) by sending our best agents to a war zone in Iraq," she wrote in a joint letter also signed by New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson.

The criticism by the two Democratic governors comes as the National Guard is planning to reduce the number of soldiers stationed along the U.S.-Mexican border beginning as early as July.

Capt. Kristine Munn said the phase-down had been planned all along since President Bush announced "Operation Jump Start" last year. The operation was designed to put Guard troops along the border in a strictly support role while new Border Patrol officers were hired and trained.

Munn said as of right now there are about 2,400 Guard soldiers in Arizona who are part of the program. She said that will be reduced, beginning July 1, to about 1,200.

Jesus Rodriguez, a spokesman for the Border Patrol, said the number of trained agents in the Tucson Sector, about 2,500 when Operation Jump Start started, is now up by about 100. He did not know how many more would be coming to the area.

"We're getting agents in all the time," Rodriguez said.

But Napolitano and Richardson said that's not enough.

"We urge you to insist that the National Guard presence be maintained at current levels unless and until the Border Patrol is staffed sufficiently to replace Guard troops on a one-to-one basis," the governors wrote.

The DynCorp recruiters will be at the Country Inn & Suites at Tucson International Airport from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. today. They have already made stops in Laredo, Texas, and Tampa, Fla., and have another stop set for Friday in Miami.

According to a DynCorp Web site posting, the job involves going to Iraq to provide training, technical assistance and mentoring to officers of the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement.

Qualifications include at least four years with the Border Patrol or as an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer.